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ABSTRACT

The literature was studied to investigate some of the significant factors that affect participation of older persons (aged 60 and over) in educational programs. Focuses of the literature review were economic and geographic background; educational gerontology; the learning environment; physical, physiological and psychological characteristics; and sociological and cultural profiles. Reasons for low-level participation of older persons were cost, inconvenience, transportation problems, and attitudes toward self, education, and educational institutions. The research recommended that education provide for lifelong learning and opportunity for flexible participation and account for prior nonacademic learning experiences. Recommendations for the learning environment included compensations for vision and hearing loss, learning aids, and teaching in the affective domain. The literature suggested that as the older segment of the population grows and increasing numbers of them participate in all forms of educational programs, the negativism about older persons and aging must be eliminated and opportunities must be created to make older learners' participation in higher education less visible and more normal. (The bibliography contains 14 pages.) (YLB)

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EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND THE OLDER PERSON

A PAPER PRESENTED TO THE RESEARCH COMMITTEE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING PROJECT
DAVIS, CALIFORNIA 95616

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LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature was studied to investigate some of the significant factors that affect participation of the older person in educational programs. Sources were abstracts, journals, textbooks, ERIC, DATRIX, and SCAN (The Social Gerontololgy Resource Center). The age-span under consideration was age 60 and over. Focuses of the literature review were economic and geographic background; educational gerontology; the learning environment; physical, physiological, and psychological characteristics; and sociological and cultural profiles. Reasons for low level participation of the older person were cost, inconvenience, transportation problems, attitudes toward self and educational institutions.

In 1975, R. E. Peterson prepared a feasibility study titled, "Meeting California's Educational Needs," and concluded the most immediate problem preventing the older person from

participating in any type of education is lack of information on educational resources.

In a recent survey reported by Roger DeCrow in New Learning for Older Adults, Adult Education Association of the USA, 26 percent was the weighted part assigned to the problem of locating an audience.

The older person has physiological, psychological, social, and cultural dimensions that are constantly interacting and these factors plus individualized differences make for a complex group with great diversity.

Following are some of the important A, B, C's (aids, barriers, and cautions) for learning facilitators working with the older learner.

Economic and Geographical Background

The population variable that will affect the educational participation is the sparse, rural or dense suburban location according to Boaz (1978).

Research has demonstrated the importance of proximity and access to educational services, (Cross, 1981). As the proportion of persons over age sixty grows, sensitivity to unmet lifelong learning rises and the need for redesigning our educational

delivery system becomes apparent. Sources differ in the limiting factors that reduce participation of the older person in learning opportunities for example: Goodrow (1975) lists the three most prevalent as poor vision, home responsibilities, and lack of transportation.

The census data show that a total of 42 million Americans are over age fifty-five and the number is growing. This group, as taxpayers, have a right to enroll in educational programs from the community college to the university level. Professor Robert Havighurst (1976) in Education Through the Adult Life Span states participation in continuing education by people over sixty will increase.

The Federal government has porvided only a fraction of its financial support for learning opportunities for adults over traditional college age, an even smaller portion is allocated for life-span learning for the older person, according to Richardson (DHEW, 1978).

Economic Profile

In the Northeastern area of the United States 10 percent participation factor is correlated, with a

16.6 percent for the West.

In Sweden, Urban Bergsten postulated an integrated relationship between work and leisure. Changing the work pattern to allow for more stimulating and enriching leisure as only part of the leisure pattern, is a highly cultural organized activity.

Mobility often presents problems for older persons, limiting their opportunities for involvement. The cost of gasoline, car maintenance, increasing loss of physical functions, and the decline in sensory acuity not only limit older persons' actual ability to transport themselves from one place to another, but also significantly affect their perception of personal mobility.

Minor obstacles may appear to be major, thereby making short distances to be long and routine directions complex. Mobility has special significance for the older woman. Two-thirds of the older population are women and seven-tenths of all older women are widows. Often, a widow is left with an automobile which she can neither drive nor maintain. Her use of the auto, may therefore decline, and mobility may become an increasingly complex obstacie.

Removing geographical barriers calls for decentralizing the colleges existing delivery system to include off-campus sites in areas with high concentrations of older persons. Removing these barriers to participation is an overall, comprehensive strategy for increasing the access of the older person to higher education or lifelong learning.

Most older persons' incomes are fixed, but inflation is not. As the cost of living rises, greater proportions of their incomes must be spent on the basic necessities of food, shelter, and clothing. This results in strict limitations on opportunities for personal growth and socializing which generally isolates the older person.

Removing the economic barrier calls for establishing a tuition policy that provides for a complete, partial, or sliding-scale reduction of tuition for older learners.

Cost barriers were emphasized with Propcsition 13, in California. Many of the courses that had a high interest for the older learner were dropped from the curriculum, 20 percent of the non-credit courses were cancelled, and 10 percent of the courses were shifted to a fee basis which may have made these

courses prohibitive costwise to the older learner.

Educational Gerentology

In Educational Interests of the Elderly, Wasserman (1976) found the overall interest in various types of college courses among the elderly is quite low and age is strongly related to course interest. Results suggest policy makers should be cautious in funding educational programs for the older person and focus on courses for individuals under 70 years of age.

Agruso (1978) describes and explains the nature of the learning process in the older learner, with emphasis on persons over age sixty-five. He focuses on specific problem areas, such as, real age related differences, and real significance of differences in learning potential, performance variables, and memory functions.

The Intergenerational Education Program in some Massachusetts schools creates opportunities for youth and elders to interact with each other. The purpose of the program is to reactivate and utilize the spirit, knowledge, expertise, and individual life experience of the current generation of older Ameri-

cans. It shows how individuals of different generations are interdependent; how information from the elderly can be recycled effectively to other generations and how our educational system can create more positive images and attitudes about today's elders.

Dr. Mel Holmes (1980) writing in the Adult Education Journal documents a study that indicates beliefs and attitudes about adult education differ significantly for andragogically and pedagogically-orientated educators.

While certain physical handicaps may occur, older persons can learn, nevertheless, older persons are interested in learning new things and are excited by interacting with younger people in intergenerational college courses. Many programs are being built on the 1965 Higher Education Act and other adult education legislation. The most recent of these, and perhaps the most innovative, is the Elderhostel which offers residential academic programs to persons within a network of over 100 college and university campuses in eighteen states for one week periods. Elderhostel attempts to integrate older persons into the larger society through intergenerational classes.

In "Adult Education," Malcolm Knowles (1978) explains the importance of seeing education as a process of continuous learning, both for the benefit of the older person and for the benefit of society, which needs people capable of learning new information throughout their lives. Knowles (1972) continues, in Toward a Model of Lifelong Education to examine some of the criticisms that have been leveled at the educational system by the social analysts. One of the new realities is that education must be a lifelong process in order to avoid "the catastrophe of human obsolescence." Based on the assumption that the purpose of education is the development of competencies for performing the various roles of human life, one element in a new educational model would be a taxonomy of these roles and their required competencies. Knowles made the original plea for andragogy over pedagogy, however, Knudson(1980) writing in Lifelong Learning says that pedagogy assumes that education of children and adults is essentially the same. Andragogy takes the view that adults and children learn in different ways. In lieu of these polarized concepts, educators need to approach human learning as a matter of degree, not kind, recognizing the similarities as well as the

differences between learning adults and learning children. Another author, Jacques Lebel (1978), says that sufficient data exist to suggest the need for a theory of education for the elderly, significantly different from pedagogy or andragogy as traditionally defined, and suggests research in the field of Gerogogy.

Still another viewpoint is expressed by Meyer (1977) in Educational Gerontology in that aging adults are competent, capable learners, and the andragogical process is one very effective way of assuring pre-retirement education using andragogy as a participatory education technique.

Removing the educational barrier involves the concepts that education must provide lifelong service and opportunity for flexible participation and that educators must account for prior non-academic learning experiences. Services must be adaptable to the special needs and life styles of the older person. These concepts involve three components of education: course content, delivery system and instructional technique.

Johnstone and Rivera (1965) conducted a national survey of adult learning, defining learning as including all "systematically" organized learning activities, but they placed "self-instruction" as a

residual category. They found the incidence of self-education very high and therefore stated, "it is probably the most overlooked avenue of activity in the whole field of adult education."

At the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Allan Tough (1971) found that almost three-fourths of learning porjects of adults are completely self-directed; about 15 percent involve group learning; 10 percent are one to one learning situations; and 3 percent programmed (teaching machines, television et cetera).

Only 20 percent of all adult learning projects are planned by a professional who is paid or institutionally designated to facilitate learning.

The Learning Environment

It has been suggested by Atan Bin Long, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin (1972), in that the "mental block factof: often experienced by nursing home patients is related to the confining physical environment, lack of communications, and restricted social activities.

Creating a good learning atmosphere could compensate for losses in vision and hearing by the

older learner.

A hostile environment is well within the province of the facilitator to correct.

Coupled with the environment, of course, are teacher behaviors. Educational research offers little material in this area, the bulk of the knowledge we have, has come from the field of guidance and counselling.

If the older learner is given excessive amounts of information from the environment causing a sensory overload, the learner may process the information in a manner that distorts and deletes by over-simplifying (Katz and Kahn, 1979).

The older learner can profit from instruction and novel experience. Aids in learning, coupled with teaching strategies, should be included in the design of learning environments. In"Guiding the Older Learner," Victor M. Agruso, Jr. (1980) suggests placing emphasis on the maximation of capacity through recognition of individual differences. We might offer a conjecture that subsequent research will show, in the case of the older learner, this 20 percent might even be less.

The fact that adults can learn and do learn throughout life, but only some adults, brings up the question of motivation, a very complex and difficult concept at best, that is further compounded in the case of the older person by a great range of age-related differences and the almost impossible task of obtaining and recording data from this group.

The entire matter might best be approached through teaching and/or facilitating in the affective instead of the cognitive domain. If we look at the Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, in the affective domain we find:

> objectives which emphasize a feeling tone, an emotion, or a degree of acceptance or rejection. Affective objectives vary from simple attention to selected phenomena, to complex but internally consistent qualities of character and conscience. We found a large number of such objectives in the literature expressed as interests, attitudes, appreciations, values, and emotional sets of biases . . . (Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia, Handbook II; Affective Domain).

There is a possibility that the older learner would be attracted to and more likely to participate in an educational undertaking that was structured in the affective domain.

Howard McClusky (1965) maintains that the older learner requires a special focus and attention:

> First, one is impressed with data showing the great range of individual differences that increase with age. So extreme are the differences that one must be very cautious about the kind of claim he makes for the validity of his generalizations. Second, data from various sources are providing a growing case for a differential psychology of adults. Already it is clear the pattern of abilities increases in difference from adolescence through early adulthood and on into the middle and late years. Third, more research is greatly needed but it must be conducted with concepts and instruments that are most relevant to the unique features of the adult condition. For example, more work needs to be done on appropriate criterion of adult intelligence, on "age fair" tests, and on devices that get beneath the surface of the adult personality. Fourth, there is a serious lack of research dealing with the lower class adult . . . Fifth, the problem of adult psychology is a part of a problem of conservation of human resources. Already the limits of the productive years are moving upwards both in theory and practice.

Physical, Physiological and Psychological Characteristics

Peter Drucker said in The Age of Discontinuity:

> Extended schooling still assumes that one can only learn before one becomes an adult. Continuing education assumes that one learns some things best as an adult. Above all, extended schooling believes that the longer we keep the young away from work and life, the more they will have learned. Continuing education assumes, on the contrary, that the more experience in life and work that people have, the more eager they will be to learn, and the more capable, they will be of learning.

Arlin's (1975) research supports the Piagetian task, for formal development of intellectual operations

that purports that some adults never reach the formal operations stages or as Arlin categorizes it, "the fifth cognitive stage." This certainly would be a barrier to participation in learning by the affected group.

Educational development usually stops when individuals do not have the disequalibrating experiences that lead to formulation of higher-stage structures.

Studies on learning in relationship to age have generally not controlled the non-learning factors. Botwinick (1975) classes these studies into six categories: conditioning, verbal learning, rigidity in learning, perceptual and psychomotor learning, practical learning and memory.

Botwinick (1971) emphasizes that what has been accepted as a deficit of the aged in ability to acquire information over periods of time may be an age deficit in the ability to acquire information in the first place. Dr. Alex Comfort (1976) applied this theory over the board in accounting for many age-related stereotypes such as an "old crock" might have well been a young "crock"; in other words, many of the traits that are attributed to aging could have been part of the

individual all his life.

Likewise learning and memory abilities are closely related processes. Porr learning ability gives little or no information for retention. Poor memory ability gives little or no evidence of learning. In the older person it is difficult to determine whether the problem is acquisition or retention of knowledge.

The undereducated older person is apt to yield passively as Ecklund suggests to "self-fulfilling prophecies . . . such as inability to learn." As a result, undereducation prohibits this potential learner in achieving satisfaction in any of the four categories of need which Howard McClusky, in a background paper on Education for the 1971 White House Conference on Aging stated.

Understanding the needs and the folkways will place the learning experience in tune with the learner's style.

"My physical handicap limits my mobility."

Sometimes it is difficult to determine whether increased participation is due to more motivation or better health. This also has a direct bearing on learning performance. The non-cognitive factors are loss

of reaction speed, health, and motivation. There is a loss of speed of response with the older person, and the more the learned response involves speed, the greater the penalty for the older person.

Personality characteristics and attitudes that affect educational participation stem from the relationship of the learner's self-concept, as for a high learner will project directly to his self-concept, the low learner will not relate. Another attitude factor is the effect of early school experiences.

The major physical changes that are common to all older learners are a decline in the speed of response of the central nervous system and a loss of acuity in hearing and vision.

The older learner will readily compensate for these losses, sometimes by mechanical means (eyeglasses, hearing aids) and taking more time (own pace) to learn the material, but even so there is no corresponding loss or decline in the ability to learn or in the power or correctness of the learning response (McClusky, 1970).

Hunt and Sullivan in an extensive review of Lewin's BPE paradigm stated that:

> We believe that the person occupies the central role in any psychological theory and that educational planning should begin with the learner rather than objectives or teaching methods.

Physical age still remains a barrier to educational opportunities for millions of older persons in America. We need to encourage life-span learning policies, removing the age factor as the prime determinant of education participation.

Traditional youth-oriented concepts of education make it difficult for older persons to relate to the services of higher education. This may explain why needs assessments conducted by colleges may yield data that indicates a low interest in education among the older population. Education is usually perceived as a "life stage" that one enters, passes through, and exits at some point with little or no thought of returning. Removing the psychological barrier calls for emphasis on eliminating older persons' perception of education as they experienced it in their youth. Programs should use informal group discussions, techniques to allow the older learner to participate not only as a receiver of information but also as a provider of information, sharing meaningful life experiences.

Sociological and Cultural Profiles

Although the exact nature of educational demands that will be placed on the delivery system in the near future is not clear, there is no doubt the older segment of our population is growing and the youth cohort is decreasing.

Another recognized social trend is the increasing number of older persons participating in all forms of educational programs.

Community education should embrace all the associated educational functions, but, according to New Directions, "The most accessible, most comprehensive community colleges still fall short of enrolling a student body which is fully representative of the communities being served." There is a need for education in the older years and certain behaviors, which apparently improve with age, are related to the prerequisites for learning according to an article by D. Woodruff (1975), "Research in Adult Learning," in the Gerontologist.

Cultural

For over thirty years Brooklyn College began granting credit for life experiences. More than 100

institutions now provide experiential credit. In the Journal of Higher Education, 66:1, May/June 1975/339 outlines how this practice is accomplished.

Allan Tough in Adult Learning Projects (1971) clearly established that the older person is a self-directed learner. In traditional education the learning activity is structured by the teacher and the institution. To accommodate the older learner this needs to be changed so learning on the learner's own initiative can take the place instead of being taught.

In his book, The Three Boxes of Life, Richard Bolles (1978) equates three life stages: childhood; adulthood; and older adulthood with the three activity boxes titled: learning; working; and playing. Although all these activities take place at all stages, the box title predominates. The relevance of the boxes' image for the older learner is break out of the box via lifetime learning.

Kurland suggests that post secondary education should "move away from the emphasis on terminal degrees," and toward the concept learning is valuable in and of itself.

in and of itself.

"The value of education is perceived strictly in terms of tangible gains, and learning pursuits are not associated with pleasurable life experiences" (Johnstone and Rivera, 1965:263).

Academic advisement is both needed and necessary for the older person planning any learning participation which will provide a new adventure for increased fulfillment, productivity, and self-expression.

According to Kasworm (1978) North America and Europe are being transformed into a society of elders primarily due to improvements in medical technology and the reduction of the birth rate. Traditional life constructs are no longer valid. The futurist must begin to explore new systems which provide a viable synergistic relationship among education, work, and leisure. Educational leaders are exploring the concepts of lifelong learning and recurrent education. The primary goal is to break up the present age-segregated youth ghetto of education and create multidiversional systems infused with concepts of lifelong learning for all age groupings. Earl Kauffman (1971) presented a paper titled, "School Bells are

Ringing for Grandparents," at the Pre-retirement Conference, 6 may 1971, Greensboro, North Carolina, in which the major premise was that morale in retirement is achieved through involvement in intellectual, social, and physical experiences which are meaningful to the person and his social milieu.

To counter this, G. B. March et al. (1977) interviewed 99 subjects aged 62 and over as to why they were not attending free university classes. Results indicated 68 percent were not interested.

"Too Old to Learn" and "You Can't Teach an Old Dog New Tricks" are only two of many negative remarks we are likely to hear about the older learner. Circumstances such as retirement and widowhood, besides our youth-oriented society, tend to isolate the older person from the mainstream of life. Therefore, older learners who choose to participate in formal educational settings are highly visible and may feel out of place when they first return to higher education.

Removing the sociological barrier involves developing an awareness of the extensive negativism about the older person and aging. Stereotypes are

held by young and old alike. Social isolation of the older person also tends to perpetuate the misconceptions of aging because people lack a positive, first-hand interaction with the aged and the experience of aging. Therefore, it is essential that emphasis must be placed on creating opportunities that make the older learner's participation in higher education less visible and more normal.

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